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## EXPOSITORY STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### V. ISRAEL IN EGYPT

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#### INTRODUCTORY: THE BOOK OF EXODUS

There is a very clear transition in passing from the first to the second book in the Hebrew canon. Genesis treats of the primitive and patriarchal stories; Exodus, of the making of the nation. The same three main strands of narrative are in both books. There is the older prophetic narrative (J), in which the divine name "Jehovah" is used from the beginning. There is the somewhat later prophetic narrative (E), in which the revelation of the name "Jehovah" is understood to have been made first to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13, 14). In this document, therefore, the word "Elohim" is used for the deity before the third chapter, but the name "Jehovah" often afterward. Thus one of the striking differences between the two documents ceases, and it is not always possible to differentiate them, so that a section must often simply be designated as JE. Markedly different from both the prophetic narratives is the priestly document (P), with its careful enumeration of genealogies, its exactness of numbers, its precision of detail, its entire reinterpretation of the ancient story from the standpoint of the more developed later age.

The Book of Exodus carries forward the story of Israel from the death of Joseph to the erection of the tabernacle, and falls into three parts: (1) Israel in Egypt, 1-13:16; (2) the journey to Sinai 13:17-18:27; (3) Israel at Sinai, chaps. 19-40.

#### ISRAEL ENSLAVED IN EGYPT: EXODUS 1:1-14<sup>1</sup>

##### I. LITERARY SOURCES

The three literary sources are very clear in the first chapter. It is the priestly writer who records the names of the patriarchs (vss. 1-5), and then in a single verse (7), which reflects the easy generalization of a later time, shows how seventy souls multiplied and filled the land of Egypt. Verses 13 and 14, in characteristic repetitious manner, are P's description of the bondage. Verses 8-12 are assigned to J, who regards the bondage as arising from a change of dynasty in Egypt and a fear of the increasing

<sup>1</sup> International Sunday-School Lesson for May 19, 1907.

numbers of the Hebrews. E, to whom belong vss. 15-22, seems to think of the people as smaller in numbers, for they need the services of only two midwives. He also regards them as living among the Egyptians rather than in a portion of the land by themselves. He has, however, the common thought of the increasing number of the Hebrews.

## II. EXPOSITION

Two distinct kinds of tradition were preserved in Israel regarding the Egyptian sojourn. There were the patriarchal stories of Joseph and his brethren, in which the migration of a single family with its dependents was thought of. Then there was the remembrance of the tribes held in Egyptian bondage and coming out with providential aid. The natural method of uniting the two strands of tradition was to suppose that families grew into tribes and that increasing numbers moved the jealousy of the native population, while a change of dynasty caused the helpfulness of Joseph to be forgotten.

There are a few scholars who deny that Israel was ever in Egypt, but the majority recognize the strength of the tradition, which is found in all our sources, and which was so confidently believed in the later Hebrew times. Nothing would be more natural than that wandering clans of southern Palestine should look with eager eyes to the rich lands of Egypt, and should seek opportunity in time of some famine stress to make a settlement across the Egyptian frontier. It is highly probable, therefore, that some of those peoples, that later formed the Hebrew nation, were permitted thus to settle in northeastern Egypt. It would then be natural enough that the Palestinian wars of Ramses II and his treaty with the Hittites would cause him to be somewhat distrustful of a considerable band of Asiatics on his border. His gigantic building operations called for large levies of workmen; so he may well have enslaved the people whose independence was a source of danger. Naville's identification of Pithom as a city built in Goshen in the reign of Ramses II lends also historical probability to the story.

This narrative gives an insight into the awful inhumanity of the forced labor of ancient times. Every captive was a slave, and the splendid structures of the ancient world represent the hopeless wretchedness of millions of men and women. Such a bondage must have been especially galling to the nomad with his passionate love of freedom. After-ages never forgot the horror of it, nor the glory of the deliverance.

There can be no doubt that the Egyptian experience had much to do with the making of the Hebrew people. The union in a common misery and in a common deliverance bound them together and prepared them

for their destiny. Had the Egyptian experience been more kindly, the Hebrews might have been absorbed in the complex population of the Nile valley and never have contributed their part to the world's life. The sacred writers clearly believed that the numbers of the people increased in accordance with the promises to the fathers, and the bitterness of the bondage was the occasion for their departure to their destiny in Canaan.

### III. APPLICATION

*The sense of destiny* is strong in this passage. It is a thought that is writ large in the Bible. The Hebrews cannot be exterminated, for God has destined them to a glorious future. So the prophets preached, believing in a Golden Age when Israel should be God's people indeed. And the New Testament has the same conception: "All things work together for good to them that love God." Jesus declares in Gethsemane with marvelous equanimity that twelve legions of angels could save him from his enemies. It is a great faith a thousand times justified. We must not be fatalists, but in our measuring of causes and calculating of effects we must not leave out God. He is greater than Pharaoh.

And so we learn *the meaning of hardship*. How much pleasanter it would have seemed to Israel to enjoy the fertility of Goshen, and to increase and multiply without hindrance in the goodly land of Egypt! Surely they had had enough of the desert. A kindly Providence would have given them favor in the sight of their neighbors. Yes, and Israel would have been a nonentity in Egypt, with no place to display her strength. Satisfied with flesh-pots, she could have produced no prophet. But we always murmur at the hardships that are pushing us out. We chafe at our troubles. And so should we miss our destiny.

Then, welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

As we enter into the lesson of faith, we feel the great truth of *God's care for the oppressed*. We think of ourselves on the side of Israel trusting Jehovah in spite of difficulties. Let us be careful that we are not on the side of Pharaoh. Dr. C. R. Brown<sup>2</sup> has strikingly used these Exodus narratives to point the lesson of modern industrial oppression. It is unhappily true of our own day that task-masters are over the poor, even the

<sup>2</sup> *The Social Message of the Modern Church*. The whole book is an interesting homiletic treatment of Exodus.

women and children, to make "their lives bitter with hard service." The modern Pharaohs shall not escape the day of reckoning.

#### CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION OF MOSES: EXODUS 2:1-15<sup>3</sup>

##### I. LITERARY SOURCES

The first fourteen verses of the second chapter are assigned by general consent to E. They are a continuation of the latter part of the first chapter. Instead of a people living apart in Goshen, it is clear that the Hebrews are living among the Egyptians in the royal city, so near that the bathing-place of the king's daughter is not far from the home of Moses' mother. There is some difference of opinion as to whether the whole of vs. 15 belongs to J, though vss. 16-23a are evidently his. In any case, E must have had an account of Moses' flight.

##### II. EXPOSITION

Moses is without question the most commanding personality in the Old Testament. The founder of the Hebrew nation, it was natural that tradition should glorify him, and that more and more of the institutions of Israel should be traced to his initiative. At last it was believed that the entire legislation which sufficed for Israel until the time of Nehemiah was all given by Moses, and finally the still more elaborate oral law which developed after the pentateuchal codification was also ascribed to the same great law-giver.

It is, of course, exceedingly difficult to find the actual Moses in the wealth of heroic tradition that has gathered about his name. Indeed, there are scholars who doubt that any such personage existed. But it seems historically highly probable that a great man should have arisen in the time of national need, and it seems religiously highly probable that the Jehovah-idea should have come from some commanding religious leader. Of course, such a personality would have grown in the imagination of his people.

The story of the birth and preservation of Moses is singularly beautiful. The mother saw that he was a goodly child and longed to save him from the cruel fate that had been decreed upon the male children of her race. The stratagem of the ark made of papyrus and committed to the waters near where the royal princess would come to bathe, of the sister ready at hand to offer the services of the Hebrew nurse, is a part of the exquisite story-telling, in which the Hebrews have never been surpassed. Of course, the story is not uncommon, and the well-known parallel of Sargon of Agadé is always suggested.

<sup>3</sup> International Sunday-School Lesson for May 26, 1907.

We may conclude that in some providential manner the boy who was to lead Israel received an Egyptian training (his name may be Egyptian), and that his lot was thus cast rather with the ruling than with the enslaved class. The statements that are often made, that Moses was heir to the Pharaoh and actually gave up the Egyptian throne, are of course without the slightest foundation. Even the later Hebrew tradition, preserved in Stephen's speech, that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," is probably considerably beyond the facts. The institutions of Israel that may have come from Moses bear little trace of Egyptian influence. The training of this prophet was rather in the Midian desert than in the Egyptian court.

The account of the crisis in Moses' life comes in a most natural manner. The conflict between the two races is suddenly presented to him in the maltreatment of a Hebrew by an Egyptian. Moses' interests are all Egyptian, his instincts are all Hebrew. With no hesitation, but to be sure that he is unobserved, he strikes down the oppressor and hides the body in the sand. He will be the friend of his people and use all his influence to protect them. More than that, he will help them to right relations with one another. But, in his eagerness to do right, he has not reckoned with the perverseness of those whom he would serve, and he meets the rebuff which is the common lot of the reformer. The natural feeling of discouragement that he cannot help his people after his own fashion, and the fear that his killing of the Egyptian may be discovered, lead him to flee to the eastern desert.

Perhaps vs. 15 is entirely from J, where the different reason for the flight is given, that the king has heard of the murder and has decided to avenge it.

### III. APPLICATION

It need scarcely be said that the religious suggestiveness of these stories does not wait upon the slow critical process of discovering the historical facts upon which they are built. We are concerned with the moral and spiritual truths that possessed the souls of the great writers, and with the suggestions that come from them into our modern life. The passage presents a necessity for the amelioration of harsh conditions, and suggests a lesson of faith and a lesson of method.

1. *The lesson of faith.*—It is a continuation of the thought of Providence that appears in the first chapter. There we see "God within the shadow keeping watch above his own." Here we see God's man getting ready. There always is a man preparing just before the crisis. There is a monk reading a Latin Bible. There is a Virginia gentleman learning the art of

war. There is an Illinois lawyer thinking upon great questions. There is a young college man training at Harvard, building up his strength in the great West, facing municipal problems in the metropolis. God uses men to do his work, and he is always getting them ready. Nobody knows. Only the mother sees she has a goodly babe. What an opportunity then for school teachers and Sunday-school teachers; for there may be a coming Moses in the class of boys! And what an encouragement in our hope for social advancement: God is preparing the leaders!

2. *The lesson of method.*—The instinct is to smite. We have seen something of the hatchet in reform. But there is little accomplished by mere force. Moses destroyed one oppressor, but that Egyptian was part of a system. Work far more fundamental was necessary. And the hot blow simply made all further effort impossible. Again, the reformer is so sure that he is right that he expects people to accept his leadership, and when they refuse he is discouraged. Helping the poor, acting as peacemaker, readjusting social misunderstanding—it is hard and often disappointing. At any moment the rude challenge may come: "Who made thee a judge over us?" There is no hope in superimposed reform. Social reformation will never go beyond personal regeneration.

#### MOSES CALLED TO DELIVER ISRAEL: EXODUS 3:1-14<sup>4</sup>

##### I. LITERARY SOURCES

After the short passage, 2:23<sup>b</sup>, 24, 25, which connects immediately with 1:14 and bears all the marks of P, the E narrative is resumed. The great E passage is 3:14, 15, in which the covenant name "Jehovah" (properly "Jahweh") is revealed. This writer never uses the personal name of Israel's God before. On this ground, and because of the characteristic phrase, "I am come down to deliver them," vss. 7 and 8 are assigned to J, and with less certainty vss. 2, 3, 4<sup>a</sup>. Neither prophetic document gives any information about Moses' age. The three forties into which his life is divided are part of the artificial exactness of the priestly document.

##### II. EXPOSITION

With Moses in Midian we are on surer historical ground. The J narrative, as we now have it, finds him there, though indeed a previous Egyptian residence is evidently assumed. A very interesting question is: How far did Moses receive his religious ideas from the Midianites (or the Kenites)? It is clear that he came from the wilderness with a new reli-

<sup>4</sup>International Sunday-School Lesson for June 2, 1907.

gious conception and with a new name for his God; he had lived in Midian with his father-in-law, who was the priest of his clan; Moses' religion and Jethro's were the same, for Jethro acknowledged Jehovah (Ex. 18:11, 12); Jehovah was considered to have his dwelling on Mount Sinai or Horeb (Ex. 3:1, 12; 18:5). Manifestly the priest of Midian did not learn his religion from Moses. Did Moses then learn his from Jethro? Many scholars hold that he did so, and that he introduced Jethro's God to the Hebrews, who by a great covenant accepted him as their God. This would be, indeed, a distinct advance above the religious ideas of the times, in that the people would be united with the deity, not by a mere local or racial tie, but by express covenant. But the sacred writers may still be correct in identifying the God whom Moses proclaimed to Israel with the God of the fathers; for the patriarchs were of the desert, and it is altogether likely that only a part of the Hebrews went down into Egypt, leaving many desert clans among whom the remembrance of the Abrahamic covenant may have lingered.

But there is a deeper reality in Moses' religion than the source of the name "Jehovah." The soul's experience of God is a reality, for which historical conditions can only partly account. Jethro's experience of God did not create a nation and give a new spiritual impulse to the world. Moses' significance is that he was one of those elect spirits to whom the Infinite Spirit could speak.

The elements of Moses' religious experience are clearly indicated in the narrative. He never forgot the misery of his people. He meditated on their unhappy lot. A son of nomad ancestry, returned to the way of life of his fathers, he felt keenly the bitterness of the bondage in which his kinsfolk were held. And coupled with this was a high sense of their destiny. Moses believed in Israel. The passionate longing for a land that should be theirs had come down from the patriarchal times, and Moses longed to see his people in a goodly heritage of their own. Who was to be the deliverer? As often as the thought was presented to him that he was the man, he had thrust it from him: "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?" But Moses came to believe profoundly in his God. What he could not do himself, Jehovah could do for him and through him. Perhaps the burning bush unconsumed and the name "I am" have something of the same significance: "The Unchanging One." Moses believes that he has a God who will be constant, who will keep covenant and mercy, who is strong enough and good enough to overcome the Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. In a splendid act of faith he accepts the commission and becomes the deliverer of Israel.



## III. APPLICATION

The four elements that enter into any great call to service could scarcely be more strikingly presented than in this narrative.

1. *Pity*.—The need is the call. Moses might easily have said that it was no concern of his. He had made an attempt and failed. He was a proscribed man, and therefore could not undertake any mission to his people. Moreover, the task was too great. Who was strong enough to free a tribe of slaves from the powerful Pharaoh? But the need is the call. If any wrong is being done, if anyone is in sorrow or pain, if there is any cry by reason of the taskmasters, then no man who realizes the need can escape its insistent call upon his pity. Woe to the man who shuts his ears to the call from the oppressed!

2. *Hope*.—A mission implies a hope. The man who works for others must believe that something can be done for them and that something can be made of them. Where others saw a band of slaves, Moses saw a nation. They were worth saving for the destiny that was theirs. The Pharisees saw publicans and sinners; Jesus saw the children of the kingdom. Where the careless saw the street Arab, Barnardo saw the sturdy young Canadian colonist. Where some see naked savages, the missionary sees a people clothed and in their right minds. Woe to the man who has no hope for the unfortunate!

3. *Humility*.—Great men are humble. It is only little men who are lightly ready for mighty tasks. If the great philanthropies and reforms and education and evangelism of our time are to wait for men and women who feel equal to the enormous demands, we shall make little progress. Where need and opportunity call we must make ourselves great in the steadfast performance of duty. And we are great, for we are partners with God.

4. *Vision*.—The call to every service is after the vision. So it was with all the prophets. The man who has seen God has seen his duty, and has been inspired to attempt it. With wonderful insight the New Testament writer has said of Moses: "He endured as seeing him that is invisible." The vision makes pity a passion, hope a certainty, humility a sublime faith, and the deliverer is born.

THE PASSOVER: EXODUS 12:21-30<sup>5</sup>

## I. LITERARY SOURCES

The accounts of the ordinance of the Passover exhibit clear marks of composite authorship. Ex. 12:1-20 is from P, describing the Passover as

<sup>5</sup> International Sunday-School Lesson for June 9, 1907.

it was observed long after in Canaan in connection with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Every item of the ceremonial is carefully prescribed. Ex. 12:21-28 is JE, although it bears the marks of deuteronomic redaction, especially vs. 24. It indicates a much simpler and more primitive festival, and there is no reference to unleavened bread. Indeed, vs. 34 indicates that the haste of departure alone prevented the bread from being leavened. Verses 29 and 30 are ascribed to J, and vss. 31-36 to E. The latter conceives the Hebrews as dwelling among the Egyptians.

## II. EXPOSITION

It is probable that the Passover is the most ancient of the Hebrew festivals, going back to the old nomad life. The meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain, the idea of "passing over" being a fanciful derivation arising out of the historical explanation of the feast. It is clearly a sacrifice that the nomads had been accustomed to make at the time of the vernal equinox, and which they had requested permission of Pharaoh to go into the wilderness to offer (5:3). Probably it was an offering of the firstlings of the herd and of the flock, according to a very general view that such belonged to the deity, and as a thank-offering for the fruitfulness of their animals. The smearing of the blood upon the entrance of the house or of the tent was for the purpose of warding off pestilence. It was a propitiation to the deity for the protection of their homes, and it was believed that where such ceremonial had been neglected the destroyer would come (cf. 5:3). In early times there was no rigid distinction between piacular and covenantal offerings; so the slain firstling was eaten as a family feast.

It is this old festival that Moses bids the people celebrate. His words, "Kill the passover" (vs. 21), imply that he is speaking of a well-known custom. But it is at the time of the spring festival that the pestilence falls upon the Egyptians, and amid the horror of that dread visitation the Hebrews are able to make their escape. It is natural that they should ever have connected the two events in memory. The very pestilence which the sacrificial blood was to avert had decimated their enemies. It was one of those timely providences that made them sure that Jehovah their God was fighting for them. Pharaoh had refused to let them offer to Jehovah the first-born of their cattle; so they said, with a natural poetic interpretation of the plague, that Jehovah had slain the first-born of the Egyptians.

After the Hebrews settled in Canaan and became tillers of the soil, they adopted the agricultural festivals, one of the most notable of which was the Feast of First Fruits, celebrated with unleavened cakes made from the

first grain of the harvest. Naturally their old spring paschal feast coalesced with this. In process of time the historical significance was attached to the combined festival, and the whole ceremonial was supposed to have originated in Egypt, as the narrative of P declares.

### III. APPLICATION

A very important thought arising from this passage is *the value of ecclesiastical festivals*. The deuteronomic reformers felt this very strongly, and insisted that the old feasts should be nobly kept, and that parents should be ready with a worthy answer when the children should ask: "What mean ye by this service?" Let it be granted that recurring celebrations tend to become formal, and let parents and teachers have such a sense of the great meaning of the past that they can always make the old truths live anew in the festival. Easter, Memorial Day, Flower Day, Fourth of July, Harvest Home, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, are more than holidays—they are holy days. Sacred memories should stir us; we should thank God for his deliverances and diligently teach them to our children.

But we also learn here *the development of old forms into new meanings*. What a history lies behind our communion service! Four or five thousand years ago the rude nomad killed the first lamb born by his young ewe and smeared its blood on his tent poles, that no angry god might smite him with the plague; then ate the flesh with his family in a sacrificial meal, thanking his god, who was supposed to be sharer in the feast, for the fruitfulness of his flock. And after the centuries a great deliverance came to be associated with this feast. And later it became a thanksgiving for all the fruitfulness of the land. And then it became a solemn commemorative ordinance. And then Jesus and his disciples ate of the feast, and the memorial Supper came into the Christian church, and today we eat in remembrance of him. So religious expression grows. Old forms and old words take new meanings; old ceremonials are modified. Only the scholar is concerned with the history of the word or the form; the religious man is satisfied that he finds God.

## ISRAEL'S ESCAPE FROM EGYPT: EXODUS 14:13-27<sup>6</sup>

### I. LITERARY SOURCES

The prophetic and priestly sources are again very evident in this narrative. P lays great emphasis upon Jehovah's might and upon the miracle of the exodus. To him are assigned vss. 15-18, 21a (as far as "over the

<sup>6</sup> International Sunday-School Lesson for June 16, 1907.

sea"), 21c ("and the waters were divided"), 22, 23, 26, 27 (as far as "over the sea"), 28, 29. These sections give the story of the division of the sea by Moses' outstretched hand, of the passage of the Israelites between two walls of water, and of the destruction of Pharaoh by the return of the waters. The remainder of the narrative is mostly from J, though to E is assigned vs. 19a, where the angel of God separates Israel from the Egyptians; also perhaps vs. 25a, the reference to the chariot wheels. The remainder gives a clear narrative by J.

## II. EXPOSITION

By common consent of almost all scholars, except the few who deny an Egyptian residence to Israel at all, the strong tradition of the passage of the Red Sea is held to have a sure historical basis. It was the birthday of the nation, it was the providential deliverance that made possible the achievement of their destiny. The psalms and the prophets are full of references to the great event. There must have been a notable escape that made such a lasting impression upon the nation.

Following the J narrative, which is evidently the most historical, it would seem that the escape from Egypt was a flight. The pestilence had thrown the Egyptians into dismay, and the Hebrews took the opportunity, under the leadership of Moses, to break up their settlement in Goshen and depart. It is impossible to form any estimate of their number. P gives a census of 600,000 fighting men, which has been supposed to represent several millions, but the older sources have no numerical statements.

The exodus was undertaken under strong religious impulse. The people had been stirred from their lethargy by the fervent prophet. The sense of a divine leadership is finely expressed by the guiding pillar of fire and of cloud. There was also a very wise human leadership. Moses did not attempt to force a passage across the fortified and guarded northeastern frontier. He led the people off the highroad of travel to the south of the fortified isthmus, where it might be possible to effect a crossing over the shallows at low tide.

But the Pharaoh had no mind to allow his slaves to escape so easily. He pursued them, overtaking them before they had reached the sea. Night intervened, and the Egyptians were unable to proceed. Then the strong east wind blew—that providential wind, perhaps the condition upon which Moses had reckoned—and the shallow waters were driven before it, making a passage possible. The Hebrews made the crossing by night, and early in the morning the Egyptians followed them. But the quicksands were

little adapted for the movement of chariots. Israel, encouraged by the providence that had saved them, fought valiantly from vantage-ground. The wind had ceased, and the tide began to rise in the shallows. Fear came upon the Egyptian army. "Let us flee from the face of Israel," they cried. But the tide rushed in too rapidly, and the Egyptians were drowned in the returning waters.

### III. APPLICATION

The story of the Egyptian pestilence and of the Hebrew escape seems so well substantiated in its main features that a lesson may well be learned from the historical facts. By two extraordinary pieces of good fortune the Hebrews were enabled to make their escape, when it might well have seemed impossible. Such good fortune we rightly call Providence. Not once or twice in the history of nations a divine power seems to have saved a great cause from defeat. The coins struck after the loss of the Spanish Armada bore the inscription: "He blew with his winds and they were scattered." Napoleon's sneer that God is on the side of the heaviest battalions perhaps has its best answer in his own fate. *Dieu et mon droit* is a great motto.

Yet Moses put no careless trust in Jehovah. All his skill of leadership was used to lead the people to the point of safety; wise generalship must have been employed to make good the passage across the shoals while the wind blew that night, and a noble fight for freedom was made in the morning.

We are equally wrongly led when we are told that we must make our own providence, and when we are told that we can leave all to God and he will bring forth good.

The long years of Moses' preparation were all needed for the great crisis. All his skill, all his prophetic fervor, all his knowledge of the ways of travel, were needed for that night. God does not make up for blundering leadership, nor bring to good fruition ill-considered plans.

But when we have done our best, when all our human foresight and skill have been employed, then quietly, serenely, may we trust in a might that is greater than our own. The strong word may come to us in our flurry and alarm, in our worries about health and fortune and the conduct of the good causes that are near our hearts—a word that may give us courage and peace and poise: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which he will work for you today."